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Tearmoon Empire

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Tearmoon Empire

SAINT-NOEL ACADEMY: GIRLS' DORMITORY

PHEEEW...

SPRAWL

ふら

FWUMP

I'M EXHAUSTED...

Chapter 6

SLOB

OH, THE TRIALS WE CELEBRITIES MUST SUFFER...

I SUPPOSE I **AM** THE TEARMOON EMPIRE'S MOST HONORABLE PRINCESS, AFTER ALL.

POSTURE UNBEFITTING A MOST HONORABLE PRINCESS.

BUT WITH ALL THOSE VISITORS WHO CAME TO SEE ME, I HADN'T THE TIME! THERE WAS JUST NO END TO THEM!

I THOUGHT I'D HAVE A CHANCE TO PLAN MY NEXT MOVE AFTER THAT DEBACLE...

SHUFFLE

LOVE

EVEN THE ATTENDANTS' BEDS ARE INCREDIBLE HERE.

ペカ SPOTLESS

BUT ANYWAY...

GLANCE

YOU WERE WONDERFUL TODAY, MILADY.

I've brought you a cup of tea!

THANK YOU, ANNE...

カシャ LAAAZE

WELL, YES. THEY WOULD HAVE TO BE.

むくり HYUP

I STILL CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL NERVOUS ABOUT IT, THOUGH!

MORE IMPORTANTLY, ANNE?

THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU.

SO NO NEED TO FEEL RESERVED! THE BED IS YOURS TO USE.

QUITE A NUMBER OF THE ATTENDANTS BROUGHT TO SAINT-NOEL ARE THEMSELVES OF NOBLE BIRTH, AFTER ALL.

THE ROOMS ARE ARRANGED TO HOUSE ***TWO*** NOBLE CHILDREN WITHOUT ISSUE.

A-ALL RIGHT!

YES.

AND IT'S A MOST IMPORTANT MATTER...

I NEED YOUR ADVICE.

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD SIT DOWN FIRST.

YES, MILADY?

YOU...NEED MY ADVICE?

GULP...!

A MOST IMPORTANT MATTER!

HAAAH

CLENCH

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION...

...ON THE MAN OF YOUR DREAMS?

DAZED ポカン

?

...ERR?

IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE, MIA WAS CONVINCED THAT SHE AND SION, CROWN PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF SUNKLAND, WERE DESTINED TO BE WED.

NOR WAS SUNKLAND INCLINED TO SEND THEIR CROWN PRINCE TO MARRY INTO THE EMPEROR'S LINE. NEVERTHELESS...

THE EMPEROR'S ONE AND ONLY BELOVED DAUGHTER, HOWEVER, COULD NEVER BE SENT OFF TO MARRY INTO A FOREIGN NATION'S ROYAL FAMILY.

...WHY DON'T YOU?

ASK ME OUT...

ASK ME OUT? NO?

PEEK ぴょこ

SIDLE

GO ON, THEN!

ASK ME OUT. I DON'T MIND!

SION'S LOOKS SWAYED MIA INTO SHOOTING HER SHOT AT HIM. REPEATEDLY.

HER EFFORTS WERE SUPREMELY ANNOYING.

スタ TMP

スタスタスタスタスタスタスタスタス TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP

DO IT!

ASK ME OUT!

...P-PROBABLY!

NOT ONLY DID HE NOT FALL FOR ME, HE'D HARDLY EVEN LOOK AT ME!

SURELY HIS TWISTED PERSONALITY WAS AT FAULT, NOT ME!

A RARE GAP IN MIA'S BLINDING VEIL OF SELF-CONFIDENCE.

MILADY...

I'VE GREAT CONFIDENCE IN MY ROMANTIC METHODS, BUT THERE'S NO HARM ASKING ANNE FOR HELP ON THE OFF CHANCE I'M WRONG.

BUT I NEED CONNECTIONS TO KEEP MYSELF FAR AWAY FROM THE GUILLOTINE, AND WHAT CONNECTION IS CLOSER THAN A LOVER OR SPOUSE?

OF COURSE, I'VE NO INTENTION OF COURTING SION THIS TIME AROUND.

WHO TAUGHT YOU TO ACT LIKE THAT?

?!

UH.

WHO?

ME, I SUP—

LISTEN TO ME, PRINCESS MIA!

GRAB

THAT ENTIRE APPROACH IS ***COMPLETELY WRONG!***

POINT

AT

YES, IT IS!

BLANK

I'M SURE SOME HIGH AND MIGHTY NOBLEWOMAN TOLD YOU THAT'S HOW YOU COURT A MAN...

...BUT ***NOBODY*** WILL GIVE YOU THE TIME OF DAY IF ALL YOU DO IS LOOK DOWN ON THEM!

I-IS THAT SO?

HMPH!

AND MOST OF ALL... THOSE PEOPLE DON'T DESERVE YOU, ANYWAY!

YOU *ARE* THE PRINCESS, OF COURSE, AND SOME PEOPLE MAY STILL BE OPEN TO A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU...

...BUT THOSE SORTS OF PEOPLE ARE ONLY AFTER YOUR POWER AND INFLUENCE!

THEY COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT YOU AS A PERSON!

YOU SHOULD BE WITH SOMEONE WHO MAKES YOU ***HAPPY***, MILADY!

ANNE...

AND WITH THAT OUT OF THE WAY, WHO IS IT YOU'RE AFTER, MILADY?!

LET'S TALK STRATEGY!

I DO BELIEVE SHE'S MORE EXCITED THAN I AM...

THE BATH CHAMBER

MY, WHAT A WONDERFUL BATH!

PIPING HOT

COULD THIS BE WHAT HEAVEN FEELS LIKE...?

はぁぁぁぁぁ♡

BUT THE BATHS YOU DRAW FOR ME JUST FEEL SO LOVELY!

THANK YOU, AS ALWAYS, ANNE.

YOU DO LOVE YOUR BATHS, DON'T YOU, MILADY?

YES, THAT'S CERTAINLY TRUE.

I'VE HEARD MOST NOBLES PREFER TO JUST WIPE THEMSELVES OFF, THOUGH...

ONE SIMPLY CAN'T LIVE LIKE THAT FOR YEARS AND NOT DEVELOP A LONGING FOR HOT WATER!

IN PRISON, THE CLOSEST I GOT TO A BATH WAS A SINGLE BUCKET OF COLD WATER ONCE A WEEK.

AND, AS A RESULT...

OHO HO

GOING TO THE TROUBLE OF HAULING WATER FOR HER EVERY DAY WAS SO, SO WORTH IT!

SOB

SOB

MILADY...

MOVED

...MIA ACQUIRED A NUMBER OF QUALITIES, NONE OF WHICH SHE NOTICED HERSELF.

FLAWLESS, TENDER SKIN WITH A HEALTHY GLOW!

LUSTROUS, FLOWING LOCKS OF HAIR!

SILKY-SMOOTH

AND ALL IT TOOK WAS A LONG, LUXURIOUS DAILY SOAK IN THE TUB.

SHINE

GLOW

パチ CLAP

Like the Moon Goddess herself!

BASK

SCRUB
ごし

OKAY, MILADY, I'LL WASH YOUR BACK NOW!

HER SKIN FEELS A LITTLE ROUGH TODAY. WAS IT THE LONG JOURNEY?

YES, PLEASE DO.

SOME HERBAL SOAP AND A MASSAGE WILL FIX THAT RIGHT UP, THOUGH!

OH! THAT REMINDS ME...

STAND

OH, WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT! I DO BELIEVE IT'S BATH TIME!

SHE DODGED THE QUESTION EARLIER...

WHO COULD BE THE GENTLEMAN PRINCESS MIA'S TAKEN AN INTEREST IN?

A QUESTIONABLY ACCURATE AND HIGHLY IDEALIZED MEMORY.

I, LUDWIG, SHALL DEDICATE MY LIFE TO YOU!

See Chapter 2

I WAS SO SURE SHE HAD A CRUSH ON LUDWIG!

HOW ELSE COULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT CONVERSATION I OVERHEARD?

ハルバヨ

SPLASH

DIIING!

OH, I KNOW!

OKAY, YOU'RE ALL CLEAN, MILADY!

WHA?!

I SHOULD WASH YOUR BACK FROM TIME TO TIME AS WELL!

THANK YOU AS ALWAYS, ANNE.

FWISH

EEK!

CONSIDER THIS A THANK-YOU FOR YOUR DILIGENT SERVICE!

Go on, sit down!

OKAY, ANNE?

N-N-NO WAY! YOU CAN'T!

HOW COULD I POSSIBLY HAVE THE PRINCESS WASH *ME*?!

PLEASE, ENOUGH WITH THE MODESTY!

IT'S NOT LIKE ANYONE IS WATCHING, AND YOU MUST BE AS TIRED AS I AM!

OHO HO HO HO HO

I'LL GET YOU NICE AND CLEAN! DON'T YOU WORRY!

!!!

U-UMM... MILADY?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

SCRUB

SCRUB

I SHOULD BE THE ONE SAYING THAT, ANNE.

...

I OWE YOU A GREAT DEBT...

YOU STAYED BY MY SIDE UP TO MY VERY FINAL MOMENTS.

...AND I INTEND TO PAY IT BACK, LITTLE BY LITTLE.

PAT

なでなで

THERE! ALL FINISHED.

NOW THEN, TO THE BATHS!

PARADISE AWAITS!

DAH

IDAN

UGH

Y—

YOU'RE...

HEE HEE! YOU TWO ARE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS, AREN'T YOU?

MISS RAFINA!

RAFINA ORCA BELLUGA

ELDEST DAUGHTER OF ORLEANS BELLUGA, THE DUKE OF THE NATION IN WHICH SAINT-NOEL ACADEMY IS SITUATED: THE HOLY PRINCIPALITY OF BELLUGA.

HAVING SERVED AS PRESIDENT OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL SINCE HER FIRST YEAR, RAFINA IS A FIGURE OF UNPARALLELED INFLUENCE WITHIN THE ACADEMY.

TA-DA

SMALL-TOWN SAINT

AND A ***PROPER, RESPECTABLE*** SAINT, UNLIKE MIA, WHOSE SAINTLY STATUS IS DUBIOUS AT BEST.

Sign this, please!

EVEN NEIGHBORING KINGDOMS KNOW HER AS A SAINT.

MOREOVER, IN AIDING HER FATHER WITH THE RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES HIS POSITION ENTAILS, HER NAME HAS RISEN TO PROMINENCE AMONG HER NATION'S PEOPLE.

MISS RAFINA!

GOOD DAY TO YOU!

IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE, MIA FOUND HERSELF DRAWN TO RAFINA'S POWER AND STATUS.

OH, AND I FOUND THE LOVELIEST HAIRPIN THAT I'M SURE WOULD SUIT YOU PERFECTLY!

I'D BE EVER SO PLEASED IF YOU'D ACCEPT IT AS A—

PARDON ME, BUT...

I'VE OBTAINED A WONDERFUL BAG OF TEA LEAVES!

WOULD YOU CARE TO ENJOY A POT OF TEA WITH ME?

HOR-

RÖR

...?!

...HAVE WE MET?

IN SPITE OF MIA'S BEST EFFORTS...

...FRIENDSHIP NEVER BLOOMED BETWEEN THEM.

FAR FROM IT.

SHE LOOKED UPON MIA WITH A FRIGID GAZE THAT MADE HER FEEL WORTHLESS.

SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER SHIVER

AND MIA NEVER FIGURED OUT WHAT SHE'D DONE TO EARN RAFINA'S CONTEMPT.

TREMBLE

MY NAME IS—

TREMBLE

A—

A PLEASURE TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, MISS RAFINA!

OF ALL THE TERRIFYING PEOPLE TO SHOW UP HERE!

MIA LUNA TEARMOON, PRINCESS OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE.

JUMP!

RAISE

GENTLE

THE PLEASURE IS ALL MINE. I'VE HEARD QUITE A LOT ABOUT YOU.

?!

WHY?

HOW?!

WHA—

BUT—

INDIFFERENT

YOUR NAME? I'D REMEMBER IT IF IT WERE WORTH MY TIME.

ONE ALMOST HAS TO FEEL BAD FOR MIA.

GYAAAA

HOW DOES SHE OF ALL PEOPLE KNOW MY NAME?!

SPLASH

BEING TREATED THIS KINDLY BY HER IS TERRIFYING!

W-WELL... IF YOU SAY SO...

EEK!

DON'T JUST STAND THERE— YOU'LL CATCH A COLD!

LET'S ENJOY THE BATHS TOGETHER.

AH
GLANCE
WHAT ABOUT ANNE...?
WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY SHARE A BATH IN FRONT OF RAFINA, COULD WE?
BUT IF I SEND ANNE AWAY NOW...
1-v-1
WE'LL BE ALL ALONE TOGETHER!
V
S
CRK ポキ
CRK ポキ
Fight!
I CANNOT BE LEFT ALONE WITH SOMEONE THIS SCARY! NO, NO, NO, ABSOLUTELY NOT!
GAAA ぐおおおおお
AAH おん
14 YEARS OLD
?
20 YEARS OLD, MENTALLY

Help save me Anne!
Anne! Anne!
RIGHT, OF COURSE...
I'LL JUST TAKE MY LEAVE, THEN!
NOOOOOO!
AH!
I get it!
HUH...?
YOUR MAID CAN FEEL FREE TO JOIN US, IF SHE'D LIKE.
YES! THAT!
I COULDN'T SAY IT BETTER MYSELF!
YES YES YES YES YES
HERE, WHERE WE SHED BOTH CLOTHES AND CLASS, THERE ARE NO PRINCESSES OR COMMONERS— JUST PEOPLE.
WOULDN'T YOU AGREE, PRINCESS MIA?

B-BUT I...

SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP

COME NOW! SIT BESIDE ME!

ANNE!

YOU HEARD MISS RAFINA!

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO ENJOY YOURSELF OFF IN THE CORNER LIKE THAT?

ちゃぽん SPLISH

OH JEEZ

A—

TUG

ALL RIGHT, THEN...

TUG

ちゃぽん SPLISH

AH! PRINCESS MIA...

COME CLOSER!

SPLASH

HEE HEE...

YOU TWO REALLY ARE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS.

BUT OF COURSE!

ANNE IS MY RIGHT HAND AND CONFIDANT!

R-RIGHT HAND AND CONFIDANT?!

SHOCK!!!

だばー BWEEEEEEH

WHA—

WHAT IN THE MOONS IS WRONG, ANNE?!

GAH!

*I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'D SAY THAT ABOUT **ME**...*

SNIFF うう…

SMIRK ニヤ

SO IF THIS TURNS INTO A FIGHT, IT'S TWO VS. ONE! MY RIGHT HAND WOULD NEVER BETRAY ME!

YES, I SEE...

IT'S NO WONDER THEY CALL YOU "THE WISDOM OF THE EMPIRE."

BY THE WAY, PRINCESS MIA...

DID THEY HAVE ONE OF THOSE LAST TIME?

OH, REALLY?

?

FWSH FWSH

THE ENTRANCE COMMEMO-RATION PARTY...?

I DON'T BELIEVE I AM...

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE ENTRANCE COMMEMO-RATION PARTY THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW?

DANCE?!

SHUDDER

SO YOU HAVEN'T HEARD? IT WILL BE A DANCE PARTY TO WELCOME THE NEW STUDENTS!

I WAS SURE SOMEONE WOULD HAVE ALREADY ASKED YOU TO DANCE WITH THEM.

I REMEMBER NOW!

I'D WIPED THAT TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE CLEAN FROM MY MEMORY!

IT HARDLY BEARS REPEATING, BUT IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE, MIA WAS CERTAIN THAT SHE AND SION WERE MEANT FOR EACH OTHER.

AS SUCH, WHEN IT CAME TIME FOR A DANCE PARTY...

BEAM ぱぁぁぁぁ

TRULY?! WITH *THE* PRINCE SION?!

LEAVE IT TO THE PRINCESS TO CHOOSE A FIRST-RATE DANCE PARTNER!

I'VE HEARD THE PRINCESS OF TEARMOON AND THE PRINCE OF SUNKLAND WILL BE PAIRING UP!

NO WAY ANY OF US COULD ASK HER WITH COMPETITION LIKE *THAT*!

OHO HO HO HO...

COME ON, THEN, SION!

HURRY UP AND INVITE ME TO THE DANCE!

シャアアアン TA-DAAA

NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE DID NOT.

WHY IN THE MOONS DIDN'T HE INVITE ME?!

GLARE

WH-WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

ALONE はつ

LOOK! DO YOU SUPPOSE PRINCESS MIA'S...?

YOU THINK...?

PANT PANT

AH...

TURN

NO...

I'M AFRAID I'M NOT IN THE MOOD.

P-PRINCESS MIA, ARE YOU ALONE?

WOULD YOU CARE FOR A DANCE...?

...

...

MAY I JOIN YOU FOR THE NEXT NUMBER...

OH WELL, FAIR ENOUGH...

...MISS RUDOLVON?

AND SO, THE ONLY PARTY MIA ENJOYED THAT DAY WAS A PITY PARTY FOR HERSELF.

SHUDDER SHUDDER SHUDDER SHUDDER SHUDDER SHUDDER SHUDDER
AHHH, NEVER AGAIN!
I **REFUSE** TO GO THROUGH THAT AGAIN!
EEK
PRINCESS MIA?! DID YOU CATCH A CHILL COMING OUT OF THE TUB?!
THANKFULLY, I HAVEN'T BRAGGED TO ANYONE ABOUT PROMISING TO DANCE WITH SION THIS TIME.
I'M SURE **SOMEBODY** ELSE WILL ASK ME...
THEY SHOULD!
THEY **HAVE** TO!
...
I HOPE THEY DO...
SHAKE
SHAKE
THIS WEAK ATTITUDE WON'T DO!
THIS PARTY IS THE PERFECT CHANCE TO MAKE SOME CONNECTIONS!
?
CLENCH
TEE HEE
I LOVE HOW EXPRESSIVE YOU ARE!

I'M AFRAID WE MUST BE ON OUR WAY!

MISS RAFINA?

A-ALL RIGHT!

COME ALONG, ANNE.

SHUFFLE

SHUFFLE

I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU DANCE, PRINCESS MIA.

GOOD NIGHT, THEN!

...TIME FOR A STRATEGY MEETING.

CLICK

HUH?

HAH

はぅ

...!

STEP

STEP

CLENCH

LEAVE IT TO ME, MILADY.

BAM

ANNE!

I REQUIRE YOUR ROMANTIC KNOWLEDGE! TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW!

UNDER-STOOD?!

...WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH EVERY PIECE OF KNOWLEDGE I HAVE TO OFFER!

I, ANNE...

GIVE

SHE HAD NO CLUE THAT ANNE, DESPITE BEING FIVE YEARS HER SENIOR, HAD NEVER BEEN IN LOVE.

OR THAT ANNE'S SO-CALLED KNOWLEDGE WAS ENTIRELY GLEANED FROM A ROMANCE NOVEL HER SISTER HAD WRITTEN.

I'M PUTTING MY FAITH IN YOU, ANNE.

MIA NEVER SUSPECTED A THING.

HAVING YOU AT MY SIDE FEELS LIKE HAVING AN ARMY OF TEN THOUSAND AT MY BACK!

LITTLE DID MIA KNOW, IT WAS AN ARMY OF TEN THOUSAND CARDBOARD CUTOUTS.

I JUST CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF MIA, THE PRINCESS OF TEARMOON!

AND, AS A DIRECT RESULT...

THAT'S HER! AND SHE'S AS BEAUTIFUL AS I THOUGHT SHE'D BE!

THE ONE THEY CALL THE WISDOM OF THE EMPIRE?

SHE'LL GO WITH SOME REAL BIGSHOT, LIKE PRINCE SION OF SUNKLAND. MARK MY WORDS...

GIVE ME A BREAK! I COULD NEVER MATCH SOMEONE LIKE HER!

SO? THINK YOU'LL INVITE HER TO THE DANCE?

PRINCESS MIA, HUH...?

Meh.

NOT LIKE I'LL EVER HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH HER.

...MIA WOULD IRREVOCABLY ALTER THE DESTINY OF A CERTAIN YOUNG MAN.

Tearmoon Empire

Chapter 7

SAINT-NOEL ACADEMY: THE GARDEN OF WATER

キラ
SPARKLE
キラ
SPARKLE

IF ANNE'S INTELLIGENCE WAS ON THE MARK, IT WON'T BE LONG NOW...

She's so pretty...

ほう
OOOH

GLANCE

!

RIGHT ON TIME!

SHIFT

そわ…

PRINCE ABEL!

ABEL
REMNO

A CLASSMATE OF MIA'S AND THE SECOND PRINCE OF REMNO, A MID-SIZED KINGDOM THAT BOASTS AN IMPRESSIVELY LARGE MILITARY.

MIA SET HER SIGHTS UPON HIM BEFORE SHE EVEN ARRIVED AT SAINT-NOEL.

Kingdom of Sunkland

Holy Principality of Belluga

Kingdom of Remno

Tearmoon Empire

IN SHORT...

AND WHILE REMNO AND THE EMPIRE ARE SOME DISTANCE APART, THEY LIE ON EITHER SIDE OF SUNKLAND.

HE'S THE ONE.

AS THE SECOND PRINCE, THE ODDS OF HIM SUCCEEDING THE THRONE ARE LOW. REMNO SHOULDN'T OBJECT TO HIM MARRYING INTO THE IMPERIAL LINE.

AS ALWAYS, MIA OPERATES UNDER A POLICY OF MIA FIRST.

IF I CAN AT LEAST ENTER INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH PRINCE ABEL...

...THEN WHEN SUNKLAND ATTACKS, I CAN CALL IN REINFORCEMENTS FROM REMNO AND CATCH THEM IN A PINCER ATTACK!

STEEL YOURSELF, PRINCE ABEL!

HEH HEH HEH...

STEP...

GRIP

DAH-

DAAAN

I SHALL STAGE OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER TO THEATRICAL PERFECTION!

A FEW HOURS EARLIER

I THINK YOU SHOULD DROP SOMETHING, MILADY!

...PARDON?

LISTEN CAREFULLY, MILADY!

PEOPLE NEED A REASON TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER. IT CAN'T BE FORCED!

WHATEVER ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

YOUR ROMANCE STRATEGY! LIKE WE TALKED ABOUT YESTERDAY!

SCHWING!

AND THAT'S WHERE DROPPING SOMETHING COMES IN!

YES, QUITE...

IF I WERE TO DO THE ASKING, PEOPLE WOULD CALL ME SHAMELESS AND IMPRUDENT.

MEN ARE USUALLY THE ONES WHO INVITE THEIR PARTNERS TO DANCE, RIGHT?

WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAPPEN NEXT?

OOPSIE!

YOU JUST WALK IN FRONT OF THE MAN YOU'RE AIMING FOR AND "ACCIDENTALLY" DROP ONE OF YOUR BELONGINGS.

I'M CERTAIN A WONDERFUL, DASHING MAN SUCH AS YOURSELF HAS LONG SINCE FOUND A PARTNER FOR TOMORROW'S DANCE, NO?

THEN YOU JUST ASK ABOUT HIS PLANS, LIKE THIS...

OH!

YOU DROPPED THIS, O FAIREST OF MAIDENS!

ASSUMING HE'S A GENTLEMAN, HE WOULD PICK IT UP AND RETURN IT TO ME.

MY! THANK YOU EVER SO MUCH!

EXACTLY!

MY PRINCESS... I CANNOT LIE. FROM THE MOMENT I MET YOU, I KNEW I HAD TO INVITE YOU TO THE DANCE!

THEN IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME...

TRULY?! WHY, I CAN'T IMAGINE ANY WOMAN WOULD TURN DOWN A MAN LIKE YOU! NOT EVEN ME!

IF HE DOESN'T HAVE PLANS YET, YOU THEN SUBTLY STEER THE CONVERSATION IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

!!! HAH! ...!!!

!!!

...BEFORE IT TURNS OUT LIKE THIS!

Happy End♡

GLADLY... ♡

WOULD YOU BE SO KIND AS TO SHARE THIS DANCE WITH ME?

ANNE'S SOURCE: *EMBRACING IN THE FLOWER FIELD*, ONE OF HER SISTER'S VERY FIRST NOVELS.

ANNE, A 17-YEAR-OLD WITH PRECISELY ZERO LOVE EXPERIENCE, HAS NO IDEA THAT REAL ROMANCE JUST DOESN'T WORK LIKE IT DOES IN FICTION.

THAT'S EXACTLY HOW IT HAPPENED IN THE STORY, AFTER ALL!

FU FU FU CONFIDENCE!!

AND IF HE'S TOO DENSE TO ASK YOU AFTER ALL THAT, ***YOU*** CAN ASK ***HIM*** UNDER THE PRETENSE OF THANKING HIM FOR HIS HELP! NOBODY WILL BE ABLE TO CALL YOU SHAMELESS FOR THAT!

ANNE...

STAND

YES?

TREMBLE TREMBLE

I RECOMMEND PICKING A NICE LITTLE HANDKERCHIEF!

YOU CAN CHOOSE SOMETHING TO DROP THAT DRAWS ATTENTION TO YOUR FEMININE CHARMS, TOO!

CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP

MIA LUNA TEARMOON: A (FORMER) 20-YEAR-OLD WITH JUST AS LITTLE LOVE EXPERIENCE AS ANNE.

YOU'RE ***INCREDIBLE!***

MILADY...

I'M HONORED TO BE OF SERVICE!

CLASP

IT'S THE PERFECT PLAN!

I'VE HALF A MIND TO MAKE YOU COMMANDER OF THE WHOLE IMPERIAL ARMY!

AND SO OPERATION HANDKERCHIEF DROP WAS A GO, FOR BETTER OR...ACTUALLY, NO, JUST FOR WORSE.

You can do it, Milady!

Let's make our move at once!

1 STEP

FIRST, I WALK JUST A FEW PACES AHEAD OF HIM...

HMPH

GLANCE

NOW!

HUH?

BAM

YOU DROPPED THIS, MY PRINCESS!

OHO HO HO! MY TECH-NIQUE WAS PERFECTION ITSELF!

IT'S SURE TO WORK!

CLENCH

AND NOW I SIMPLY WAIT FOR HIM TO CALL OUT TO ME!

FLUTTER

...

.....

.....?

GLANCE

...

.....

SILENCE

...

HUH?!

そよ
FWSH

そよ
FWSH

DUN-

DUN-

DUUUN

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER, MY DEAR LADY?

S-SOMETHING'S WRONG! WHAT SORT OF GENTLEMAN WOULDN'T PICK IT UP?!

!!!

WHERE IN THE MOONS DID THE PRINCE GO?!

I—
I FORGOT!
ダァーアァン
HORROR
THE MAN IS AN INCORRIGIBLE PLAYBOY!
INDEED, WHEN FACED WITH A LOST HANDKERCHIEF AND A GIRL IN NEED OF ATTENTION, ABEL WOULD WITHOUT FAIL PRIORITIZE THE LATTER!
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キララ
HE WAS A MAN AS HANDSOME AS HE WAS SHALLOW AND PRETENTIOUS.
OH NO OH NO OH NO
U-UMM, WHAT DO I DO NOW...?
WHERE'S MY TACTICIAN?!
TACTICIAN!
Mia's Tactician
SNAG
HM? WHAT'S THIS...?

!!!

I SUPPOSE SOMEONE DROPPED IT?

WHY?!

WH—

WH—

IS ANYONE HERE MISSING A HANDKERCHIEF?

AHHH SCREECH

AH!

I RECOGNIZE THAT!

EEEEEK ヒィィィ

WHY WOULD HE PICK IT UP, OF ALL THE PEOPLE?!

I BORROWED ONE JUST LIKE IT YESTERDAY, SO I'M CERTAIN!

THE LACE ON THE EDGES HAS A VERY UNIQUE PATTERN! SEE?

DASH

IT BELONGS TO PRINCESS MIA!

GAH!

TIONA!!!

SION AND TIONA ARE THE **LAST** PEOPLE I WANT TALKING TO ME!

THIS IS TERRIBLE!

SPEED-SNEAK

そそくさ

TIME TO PRETEND I DIDN'T NOTICE AND BEAT A HASTY RETREAT!

QUIVER
QUIVER
TH-TH—
THAT MEDDLING LITTLE GIRL!
PRIN-CESS MIA!
YOU DROPPED SOME-THING!
TURN
MY...
SO I DID!
WHICH?!
AH!
LOOK, THERE SHE IS NOW!
!
FAITH

!!

OH, I SEE.

SO IT TRULY WAS YOURS, PRINCESS MIA.

OHO HO HO

HOW TERRIBLY CARELESS OF ME!

THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR LETTING ME KNOW.

BOW

?

I BELIEVE THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE MET.

I AM SION SOL SUNKLAND, PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF SUNKLAND.

I'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS.

SNEAK SNEAK SNEAK

WELL, GOOD DAY TO YOU...

AND WHAT A FINE COINCIDENCE THIS IS.

!!!

COURT-SY

MY, HOW COURTEOUS!

INDEED, I AM MIA LUNA TEARMOON.

MIGHT I ASK WHETHER YOU'VE CHOSEN A PARTNER FOR TOMORROW'S DANCE?

IF NOT, I'M OF A MIND TO NOMINATE MYSELF FOR THE ROLE.

キラ SPARKLE

キラ SPARKLE

SPARKLE キラ

WHAT IN THE MOONS IS HAPPENING?!

HOW?

WHY?

M-MY, YOU'RE ASKING ME...?

IF I ALLOW SION TO BECOME MY DANCE PARTNER...

...IT MEANS FORMING A DEFINITE CONNECTION WITH HIM!

REVOLUTION!

WAR WITH SUNKLAND!

GUILLOTINE!!!

AND THE DEEPER THAT CONNECTION GROWS...

...THE HIGHER THE ODDS OF ME MAKING AN IRREPARABLE MISTAKE!

FRET

FRET

BUT IF I TURN HIM DOWN, I MIGHT SOUR SION'S OPINION OF ME!

AND NOBODY WOULD ASK OUT THE PRINCESS WHO TURNED DOWN AN INVITATION FROM A PRINCE AMONG PRINCES LIKE HIM!

?

THAT WOULD BE A DISASTER!

I CANNOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN!

ABEL!

WH-WH-WHAT SHOULD I DO?!

THERE HAS TO BE SOME WAY FOR ME TO ESCAPE...

COME WITH ME!

YANK

...!

...!

AH

HM? WAS THAT...?

THIS IS...

DASH

EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT!

...MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE!

GAIN REMNO: FIRST PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF REMNO

ABEL.

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?

YES, MY DEAR BROTHER ...?

WHAM

...TO—

I WAS LOOKING FOR A DANCE PARTNER...

JUST WHAT I SAID I WAS DOING!

Tch...

WHAT A TERRIBLY BARBARIC MAN...

WIMPY PIECE OF...

IF YOU HAVE ANY PRIDE AS A REMNO, LEARN TO SWING A DAMN SWORD!

THEN THEY'LL LINE UP TO LICK YOUR BOOTS!

ALWAYS BENDING OVER BACKWARDS TO SUCK UP TO SOME WOMAN!

AFTER ALL, YOU'RE A PATHETIC LOSER WHO'S NEVER BEATEN ME EVEN ONCE IN A SWORDFIGHT!

HA HA HA HA

THEN AGAIN, NO DECENT WOMAN WOULD WANT TO DANCE WITH ***YOU*** REGARDLESS.

NO MATTER ***HOW*** MUCH OF A SUCK-UP YOU ARE !

...

RUSH

PRINCESS MIA!

STEP

WHAT'S GOING ON OVER...

HUH?!

WHO'RE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE MATTER HERE?

AH!

...!

JUST YOUR USUAL BROTHERLY QUARREL— NOTHING TO WORRY YOUR PRETTY LITTLE HEAD OVER.

SORRY, YOUNG LADY, BUT WE'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING.

YOU GET ME?

WE'LL ALL BE BETTER OFF IF YOU JUST MOSEY ALONG ON YOUR WAY.

HM? WHAT, DID I SCARE YOU? 'SCUSE ME FOR THAT.

...

WHAT A NAUGHTY LITTLE BOY!

MY!

HEE HEE...

?

WH—

WHAT'S SO DAMN FUNNY?!

TEE HEE HEE

WHY, COMPARED TO THE MURDEROUS RAGE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMY, THIS BOY'S BLUSTER IS NOTHING MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY!

NOT THAT I WOULD EXPECT MUCH ELSE FROM A SHELTERED, PAMPERED PRINCELING!

HOWEVER...

MY, HOW RUDE OF ME.

I'D MUCH PREFER IF YOU'D KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF MY DANCE PARTNER'S FACE.

YOUR WHAT...?

TWITCH

WIPE

REALLY, PRINCE ABEL...

TURN

YOU DO KNOW THIS HAPPENED BECAUSE YOU KEEP FLIRTING WITH OTHER GIRLS, EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE ALREADY ARRANGED TO DANCE WITH ME, RIGHT?

HUH...?

A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, FIRST PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF REMNO.

I AM MIA LUNA TEARMOON, PRprincess OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE...

SPIN

...AND THE WOMAN WHO HAD THE INDECENCY TO CHOOSE YOUR BROTHER.

THE EMPIRE?!

!!!

SHOCK

...IT IS WITH THE UTMOST REGRET THAT I INFORM YOU I CANNOT ACCEPT YOUR INVITATION TO THE DANCE.

AND THAT IS WHY, PRINCE SION...

PEEK ひょこっ

HUH...?

I SEE...

A SHAME, BUT SO IT GOES.

SIGH

AH

WHA...

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR ESCORT TOMORROW, PRINCE ABEL.

OHO HO HO

WELL THEN, I MUST BE OFF. GOOD DAY TO YOU ALL!

Tch!

DASH

TMP

YOUR HIGHNESS!

MY OH MY...

YOU WERE WATCHING, KEITHWOOD ...?

SHE SURE TURNED YOU DOWN GOOD, MILORD.

I SURE DIDN'T SEE *THAT* COMING, THOUGH.

A SHAME TO MISS OUT ON A CHANCE TO ACQUAINT YOURSELF WITH HER...

...BUT IT'S HARDLY THE ONLY CHANCE YOU'LL GET.

HM?

NOW, DON'T TELL ME...

...YOUR MOOD'S SOURED JUST BECAUSE A GIRL WON'T DANCE WITH YOU?

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY HE MAKES A FACE LIKE THAT...

OF COURSE SHE'D FEEL THE URGE TO GO TO ABEL'S AID.

I WOULD FEEL IT TOO.

HER ACTIONS WERE EXEMPLARY, AND SPARED PRINCE ABEL'S REPUTATION.

MOREOVER, REMNO'S FIRST PRINCE SEEMS A RATHER DISAGREEABLE SORT.

NO, NOT AT ALL.

I AM NOT SULKING!

SNAP!

I'M WELL AWARE SHE HAS THE RIGHT TO DENY MY INVITATION.

BESIDES, I WAS THE ONE WHO ASKED.

AND YET YOU CAN'T HELP BUT SULK ABOUT IT?

I'M JUST...

...A TAD DISAPPOINTED, THAT'S ALL.

HMPH

I'M NOT UPSET ABOUT IT.

PRINCESS MIA, HUH?

NOT THAT I'D SAY IT OUT LOUD, BUT MILORD SION HAS PRINCE ABEL BEAT FLAT.

ABEL HAS HIS LOOKS, SURE, AND I'M SURE HE GETS HIS FAIR SHARE OF ATTENTION.

BUT SURELY ANYONE, SAGE OR SIMPLETON, COULD SEE THAT SION IS SUPERIOR IN EVERY ASPECT.

HMM...

MY TEASING USUALLY WOULDN'T GET HIM THAT WORKED UP.

THIS REALLY IS A RARE CASE.

DOES SHE SEE SOMETHING ELSE IN PRINCE ABEL? SOMETHING THAT ELUDES ME?

THEY DO CALL HER THE GREAT SAGE OF THE EMPIRE, BUT WHO IS SHE, REALLY?

A BENEVOLENT SAINT WHO SPARES NO EFFORT FOR THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF OTHERS?

OR A SCHEMER WHOSE EVERY MOVE IS METICULOUSLY CALCULATED?

OR MAYBE...

...SHE'S NOTHING MORE THAN A FIENDISH LITTLE SEDUCTRESS WHO SIMPLY WANTED TO TEASE SION.

COULD IT BE?

KEITHWOOD'S EVALUATION FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR ONE SIMPLE FACT.

EXACTLY!

I REJECTED PRINCE SION! IN PUBLIC, WITH ALL EYES UPON US! THAT WAS SIMPLY SUBLIME!

STOP

PHEW...

MIA WAS, AT HEART, A PROFOUNDLY PETTY PRINCESS.

HM?

TMP

PRINCESS MIA, WAIT!

PLEASE, TAKE PRINCE SION AS YOUR PARTNER TO THE DANCE.

MY, PRINCE ABEL!

I'M REALLY GRATEFUL THAT YOU SAVED ME, PRINCESS MIA...

...BUT THAT WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH.

NO, NOT AT ALL!

OH?

WAS THAT A REJECTION? DO YOU INTEND TO EMBARRASS ME?

WE'RE A TERRIBLE MATCH, YOUR HIGHNESS! I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR YOU!

BUT WHAT'S THE POINT OF DANCING WITH *ME*?!

IN THAT CASE...

IMPROVE. BETTER YOURSELF.

MAKE YOURSELF INTO A MATCH FOR ME.

I'M SORRY, PRINCESS MIA, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE TALENT.

...

I... I CAN'T.

NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY, I'VE NEVER EVEN STOOD A CHANCE AGAINST MY BROTHER.

I COULD NEVER MEASURE UP TO PRINCE SION!

THE KINGDOM OF REMNO HELD ITS OWN AGAINST ITS LARGER, MORE INFLUENTIAL NEIGHBORS BY WAY OF MILITARY MIGHT.

CRASH

CLANG

AS ROYALTY, ABEL WAS SUBJECTED TO INTENSE SWORDSMANSHIP TRAINING STARTING IN HIS CHILDHOOD.

HE WAS TOLD THAT SO LONG AS THE KING'S BLOOD RAN IN HIS VEINS, HE HAD TO STRIVE TO BE THE BEST.

UGH...

HMPH. PATHETIC.

I'LL KEEP TRYING, KEEP TRAINING, AND SOMEDAY...

I WANT TO BEAT HIM...

I WANT TO BE... THE BEST...

ABEL DEDICATED HIMSELF SINGLE-MINDEDLY TO HIS GOAL.

UNTIL ONE DAY, HE VISITED THE KINGDOM OF SUNKLAND...

SQUEAL

CHEER

BRATO

That's ten wins in a row!

And he's fighting adults!

I'M TOLD THAT HE IS YOUR AGE.

HIS NAME IS PRINCE SION, YOUR HIGHNESS.

STARK

HITTING

...AND HIS RESOLVE WAS SHATTERED.

HE'S STRONG. STRONG ENOUGH TO PUT MY BROTHER TO SHAME.

SO WHAT'S THE POINT OF TRYING AT ALL?

AND I'M NOT ONE OF THEM. HOWEVER HARD I TRY, I'LL NEVER BE MORE THAN SECOND-RATE.

I SEE NOW.

SOME PEOPLE ARE SIMPLY FAVORED BY GOD.

AND WHAT'S WRONG WITH LETTING MYSELF ENJOY LIFE?

IF I DON'T TRY, I WON'T HAVE TO SUFFER THIS HARDSHIP.

AFTER ALL...

I CAN LIVE A SECOND-RATE LIFE BEFITTING MY SECOND-RATE SELF.

PRINCE ABEL.

AH!

IGEN

TLE

ALL YOU KNOW IS ***NOW.***

YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE ***NOW.*** AM I WRONG?

HUH...?

HOWEVER...

IF YOU'RE UNWORTHY OF ME TODAY, THERE'S ALWAYS TOMORROW. IF NOT TOMORROW, THE DAY AFTER.

THERE'S NO TELLING HOW MUCH A PERSON CAN IMPROVE THROUGH EFFORT AND DILIGENCE.

WHO IS TO SAY YOU WON'T STAND ABOVE EVEN PRINCE SION THE DAY YOU DRAW YOUR FINAL BREATH? NONE CAN DENY THE POSSIBILITY— NOT EVEN YOU.

STEP

I CHOSE ***YOU*** TO BE MY DANCE PARTNER.

IF YOU'LL ALLOW IT, I WOULD OFFER YOU SOME ASSURANCE.

THERE ISN'T THE SLIGHTEST POSSIBILITY THAT YOU ARE LESSER THAN PRINCE SION, MUCH LESS YOUR BROTHER.

I, MIA LUNA TEARMOON, GUARANTEE IT.

...!

PRINCESS MIA...

HER WORDS ARE WASTED ON THE LIKES OF ME.

...THANK YOU.

AND SO...

GRIN

WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE HER FAITH...?

THANKS TO MIA'S FORCIBLE INTERVENTION, ABEL WOULD TRAVEL A PATH FAR-FLUNG FROM THE SECOND-RATE FUTURE HE HAD PLANNED FOR HIMSELF.

THAT SAID...

AFTER ALL...

I'LL HAVE TO MAKE SURE PRINCE ABEL APPLIES HIMSELF!

...ULTIMATELY, MIA WAS SIMPLY PUTTING HERSELF FIRST, AS ALWAYS.

...I CAN'T HAVE THAT BROTHER OF HIS THROWING A WRENCH IN THE WORKS IF I EVER HAVE TO CALL ON ABEL FOR REINFORCEMENTS!

Tearmoon Empire

Chapter 8

SAINT-NOEL ACADEMY: THE DAY OF THE DANCE PARTY

RESTLESS

THERE'S STILL SOME TIME LEFT BEFORE THE PARTY BEGINS...

HOW COULD I HAVE ENDED UP AS THE PRINCESS OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE'S DANCE PARTNER?

SO MUCH HAPPENED TO ME YESTERDAY...

...BUT I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT WAS REAL. COULD I HAVE IMAGINED ALL OF THAT?

"WHO IS TO SAY YOU WON'T STAND ABOVE EVEN PRINCE SION THE DAY YOU DRAW YOUR FINAL BREATH? NONE CAN DENY THE POSSIBILITY— NOT EVEN YOU."

"IF YOU'LL ALLOW IT, I WOULD OFFER YOU SOME ASSURANCE."

THAT'S RIGHT...

I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN TO BECOME A MAN WHO'S WORTHY OF HER!

AFTER ALL...

...HER WORDS WERE LIKE A REVELATION, AND SHE WAS THE GODDESS WHO GRANTED THEM TO ME!

AT HEART, ABEL WAS PURE AND GENUINE TO A FAULT.

MEAN-WHILE...
UGGGH...
SCRUB
ごし
SCRUB
ごし...
ぬ
o
o
o
o
ち
よ
THE WORST...
SNIFFLE
THIS IS THE ABSOLUTE WORST!
...ABEL'S GODDESS WAS SOBBING TO HERSELF IN THE BATH CHAMBERS.
す

ONE HOUR AGO...

YOU LOOK WONDERFUL, MILADY!

OHO HO HO, THANK YOU!

I KNEW HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY WOULD SEND YOU THE FINEST DRESS HE COULD FIND!

ANNE, DO YOU HAVE A PHIAL OF THAT PERFUME I'M PARTIAL TO ON HAND?

That's right!

I DO! JUST A MOMENT, MILADY!

PSH

MY, THAT LONG?

IT LOOKS LIKE THERE'S STILL ABOUT TWO HOURS BEFORE THE PARTY STARTS.

PSH

PSH

PSH

PSH

PSH

I'LL RETURN SHORTLY!

THEN I BELIEVE I SHALL TAKE A STROLL AROUND THE GROUNDS.

GLANCE

GLANCE

OH, MY...

ぽ
GAPE

I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE THIS CLOSE UP BEFORE.

A horse...

THE HORSEMANSHIP CLUB MUST BE WALKING IT.

SNIFF

?

SNORT

OH! DO YOU WANT ME TO PET YOU, PERHAPS?

TWITCH

REACH

BWACHOO
H-HEY! YOU ALL RIGHT, MISS?!
DRIBBLE
SNOT
SOAKED
E—

EEEEEEEEN!!!

GAAAAAH

EEK

SLIMED...

MILADY?!

LATHER

LATHER

LATHER

And then we'll get you to the baths!

Let's get that dress off right away!

PSH

PSH

PSH

PSH

PSH

BECAUSE OF THIS, MOSTLY.

UGGGH...

WHY DID THIS HAVE TO HAPPEN TO ME?!

...

C C

WE CAN START OVER, SO DON'T WORRY...

ANNE... THERE'S SIMPLY NO TIME TO START FROM SCRATCH.

SPLASH

ナレーション

はぁ

？？

SORRY FOR THE WAIT, MILADY! I'M ALL READY NOW!

PLEASE JUST HELP ME PUT ON SOME BASIC MAKEUP SO I DON'T MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF.

YOU CAN PICK ANY OLD DRESS. IT HARDLY MATTERS...

しゅん

DOWNCAST

AT THAT MOMENT...

...!

CLENCH

MILADY, MIA'S LOOKS ARE NOTHING TO SNEEZE AT ALREADY, SO SIMPLE MAKEUP'S ENOUGH FOR HER TO LOOK STUNNING!

I DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO PUT HER IN A FORMAL DRESS...

...SO I'LL HAVE HER WEAR SOMETHING SIMPLE THAT BRINGS OUT HER OWN NATURAL BEAUTY!

HER MAID'S SPIRIT AWAKENED, ANNE WORKED LIKE A WOMAN POSSESSED.

I WILL NOT ALLOW THE PRINCESS TO EMBARRASS HERSELF!

ぐぐぐぐぐ

...A FIRE WAS LIT IN ANNE'S SOUL.

CHATTER

CHATTER

AND IN THE END...

CLA

CK

STIR

HEY, LOOK, OVER THERE!

ISN'T THAT...

...PRINCESS MIA OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE?!

MURMUR

MURMUR

I KNEW IT...

SIGH

OF COURSE I'D STAND OUT LIKE A SORE THUMB, DRESSED THIS LIGHTLY...

I FEEL JUST AWFUL. ALL OF ANNE'S HARD WORK, WASTED.

WASTED? HARDLY.

MIA'S BEAUTY WAS ENOUGH TO TURN THE HEAD OF EVERY BOY PRESENT.

SHIMMER

FRESHLY BATHED AND NOT ASPHYXIATED BY A CORSET, MIA'S SKIN GLOWED WITH HEALTH.

SHIMMER

ITS PEARLESCENT SHINE WAS ONLY ENHANCED BY HER SIMPLE, WHITE DRESS.

SPARKLE

SPARKLE

AND WHEN VIEWED IN THE DIM LIGHT OF THE DANCE HALL...

SPARKLE

SPARKLE

IT'S THE GODDESS OF THE MOON HERSELF!

SHIIINE

ABEL WAS NO EXCEPTION.

SHE'S GORGEOUS!

REALLY?

I'LL BE DANCING WITH HER?

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY.

!

AH

THIS HAS TO BE A DREAM, RIGHT...?

PRINCE ABEL!

WRONG.

OH, I SEE.

SHE'S TRYING TO TELL ME SHE CAN'T BE MY DANCE PARTNER, RIGHT...?

GLUM

REALLY, I'M SO ASHAMED.

TO THINK I'D ARRIVE SO POORLY DRESSED!

OH, DON'T BE SORRY. I DON'T MIND.

YOU ARE VERY BEAUTIFUL, AFTER ALL.

PRINCE SION'S A FAR BETTER MATCH FOR HER THAN I AM.

YEAH, I FIGURED AS MUCH.

...!

FEEL FREE TO INVITE PRINCE SION TO DANCE.

I'M NOT WORTH YOUR TIME, PRINCESS.

PHEW...

THAT IS MOST KIND OF YOU, PRINCE ABEL.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

HE DIDN'T SAY A WORD ABOUT THE DRESS...

WELL THEN, SHALL WE?

GRAB

...HUH?

WHA...?

THERE WAS, HOWEVER, ONE SUBJECT IN WHICH SHE HAD ALWAYS EXCELLED.

WHEN IT CAME TO ACADEMICS, MIA HAD NEVER BEEN AN IMPRESSIVE STUDENT.

SPIN

LIFT

WHAT...?

THAT SUBJECT WAS BALLROOM DANCING.

WHOA!

TWIRL

AFTER MIA'S OBSESSION WITH SION LEFT HER DATELESS AND DESOLATE IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE...

...A RUMOR CIRCULATED THAT SHE HATED DANCING. CONSEQUENTLY, NO ONE EVER ASKED HER TO DANCE WITH THEM AGAIN.

ALONE

SMUUUUUUG!

I'VE NEVER HAD THE CHANCE TO DANCE AT SCHOOL BEFORE!

THE TIME HAS COME FOR ME TO SHOW OFF MY EXPERTISE!

...

WOOSH

TMP

HE SEEMS TO KNOW WHAT HE'S DOING.

HM. NOT BAD AT ALL.

I CERTAINLY PREFER THAT TO A MAN WHO FOCUSES SO HARD ON DANCING WELL THAT HE LOSES TRACK OF HIS PARTNER.

THERE'S A STIFFNESS TO HIS STEPS...

...AND I SUSPECT THAT'S BECAUSE HE'S TAKING GREAT CARE TO NOT TRAMPLE MY FEET.

THOUGH, OF COURSE...

GIVEN THAT HE'S DANCING WITH **ME** HE NEEDN'T CONCERN HIMSELF!

...!

I DO BELIEVE HE HAS POTENTIAL WORTH POLISHING!

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? IMPERIAL PRINCESS OR NOT, SHE'S JUST A KID.

IS THAT IT?

I SUPPOSE SHE STANDS OUT, BUT HER DANCING'S NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT.

NO...

IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN...

Do you think he's alone?!

Eeek! It's Prince Sion!

...OR IS PRINCESS MIA HOLDING BACK SO I CAN KEEP UP?

IS IT JUST ME...

AND SHE'S DOING IT SO SUBTLY, NOBODY AROUND US COULD EVER NOTICE...

THEY PROBABLY THINK I'M THE ONE LEADING HER, EVEN!

I CAN TELL THAT SHE'S NO STRANGER TO DANCING.

THERE'S NO WAY SHE COULD LEAD ME THIS CAREFULLY AND SKILLFULLY OTHERWISE.

SNICKER フス...

フス SNICKER フス

フス フス SNICKER

THAT'S WHY THEY'RE ACTING LIKE THAT...

...

SHE BELIEVED IN ME...

...AND NOW THANKS TO ME, SHE'S BEING HUMILIATED!

MY, PRINCE ABEL, YOU'RE QUITE THE DANCER—

PRINCESS MIA.

TMP

PRINCE ABEL? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

?

COME WITH ME.

LEAD.

PRINCE SION.

PUSH...

I NEED TO ASK YOU A FAVOR.

PRINCE ABEL! WHAT IS IT?

WOULD YOU BE THE PRINCESS'S DANCE PARTNER?

WHAT IN THE MOONS IS HE THINKING?!

SHOCK

HUH?!

I HOPE YOU WOULDN'T MIND?

...

I'M FEELING A LITTLE TIRED, I'M AFRAID.

I THINK I COULD USE A BREAK.

FAIR ENOUGH.

I'LL ADMIT, I VERY MUCH WISHED TO TAKE TO THE FLOOR WITH PRINCESS MIA.

U-UMM, PRINCE ABEL...?

QUIVER

QUIVER

SORRY, PRINCESS MIA.

I'LL GO GET US SOME DRINKS.

!!!

MIGHT I ASK YOU TO JOIN ME FOR A NUMBER?

...THIS IS HAPPENING, THEN, WHETHER I LIKE IT OR NOT?

DAZED

I SUPPOSE...

STEP

I'VE JUST HAD AN EXCELLENT IDEA!

WAIT...

AH!

FRIENDLY

JUST ONE DANCE, THEN.

VERY WELL.

STING

...

BECAUSE...

...I'M POWERLESS.

JUST A MOMENT AGO, HER LOVELY SMILE WAS MINE ALONE...

...AND NOW, SHE'S AIMING IT AT SOMEONE ELSE.

ORDINARILY, I'D SOONER DANCE WITH **ANYONE** OTHER THAN PRINCE SION...

MWA HA HA HA HA

THE HORRIBLE TRUTH HIDDEN BEHIND MIA'S LOVELY SMILE.

...BUT SINCE I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY, I MIGHT AS WELL USE IT TO TRIP HIM UP!

I HOPE HE TAKES A SPECTACULAR FALL AND HUMILIATES HIMSELF IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE DANCE HALL!

FWOOSH

OF COURSE, I DON'T PLAN ON **LITERALLY** TRIPPING HIM.

STEP

!

TWITCH

AFTER ALL, HE'LL TRIP OVER HIS OWN TWO FEET IF I DANCE WITHOUT HOLDING BACK!

BAM

MIA HAD FORGOTTEN A CRUCIAL FACT.

GRIP

SHE'D FORGOTTEN THAT SION SOL SUNKLAND...

PULL

...WAS FLAWLESS IN EVERY WAY.

...!

GRACEFUL

AND HERE I THOUGHT I'D BE WALTZING WITH A FLEDGLING...

...NOT TANGOING WITH A SWAN.

HOW IS THIS HAPPENING?!

DUN-

DUN-

DUUUN

H—

H—

I THINK NOT.

RIGHT! WHY, A MOMENT AGO SHE WAS DANCING LIKE A TALENTLESS LITTLE CHILD...

O-OH, PLEASE. THE PRINCE IS JUST MAKING HER LOOK GOOD.

IF YOU WANT YOUR DANCE TO TRULY DAZZLE AN AUDIENCE...

SURELY YOU'RE AWARE IT TAKES TWO TO DANCE, HOWEVER SKILLFUL YOU MAY BE?

STIFFEN

M-M-MISS RAFINA?!

...YOU NEED A PARTNER WHO'S JUST AS SKILLED AS YOU ARE.

COME TO THINK OF IT...

SHE'D PROBABLY PREFER A COLD DRINK, WOULDN'T SHE?

I THOUGHT THAT I COULD NEVER BEAT PRINCE SION, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED.

AND YET...

I CAN'T STAND THIS.

I DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP!

I DON'T WANT TO LOSE.

NEXT TIME...

...I SWEAR I WON'T JUST GIVE HER AWAY.

WHO

OST

...I MEAN, NO! NOT DREAMY!

HE'S THE LAST PERSON I SHOULD BE DREAMING ABOUT!

SPELLBOUND

AHH... HOW TERRIBLY DREAMY...

MY! ISN'T THAT PRINCE ABEL?

IS HE...?

CHEEEEER
CLAP CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
SO, PRINCESS MIA.
CARE TO JOIN ME FOR ANOTHER NUMBER? A QUIETER ONE, THIS TIME?
I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, BUT I MUST DECLINE.
DON'T YOU THINK THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE WHO'D BE A MORE SUITABLE PARTNER FOR YOU, PRINCE SION?
BEFUDDLED
...HUH?
SORRY, MISTER PRINCE, BUT YOU CLEARLY CAN'T KEEP UP WITH ME, EVEN IF YOU ARE A LITTLE GOOD AT DANCING!
JUST A LITTLE!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
MIA IS AN INCREDIBLY SORE LOSER.

AH

PRINCE ABEL!

...HUH?

MY, HOW FLATTERING OF YOU!

ふわ SMILE

BA-DUMP...

AH, PRINCESS MIA.

I THOUGHT SHE'D DANCE WITH HIM AT LEAST TWO OR THREE MORE TIMES.

YOU WERE BRILLIANT OUT ON THE FLOOR.

Here you go.

FOR... PRINCE SION.

HM?

NO MATCH FOR WHOM?

I HAVE TO SAY... I'M NO MATCH, AM I?

GLANCE

IT PAINS ME TO ADMIT IT, BUT THERE'S NO WAY I COULD HAVE DRAWN OUT AS MUCH OF YOUR POTENTIAL AS HE DID.

...

THIS DRINK YOU BROUGHT ME IS MOST COOL AND REFRESHING.

SIP

YOU ARE A KIND AND WONDERFUL PERSON, PRINCE ABEL.

WHAT I MEAN IS THAT YOU WERE MINDFUL OF HOW TAXING DANCING CAN BE. ***THAT'S*** WHY YOU BROUGHT IT FOR ME, ISN'T IT?

...!

IT'S AH

DID YOU REALLY THINK I WAS THE SORT OF MAN WHO'D ONLY BOTHER GETTING A GLASS FOR HIMSELF, THOUGH?

THANKS, I GUESS.

SHAKE SHAKE

NO, NOT AT ALL.

PRINCE ABEL.

PLEASE DO NOT DISPARAGE YOURSELF.

THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME, YOU KNOW?

THE FIRST TIME A BOY MY AGE SHOWED ME KINDNESS NOT BECAUSE I'M THE IMPERIAL PRINCESS...

...BUT SIMPLY BECAUSE HE CARED FOR ME.

YOU *ARE* A WONDERFUL PERSON.

...

MY!

IN THAT CASE, ALLOW ME TO TRAIN YOU!

BUT...

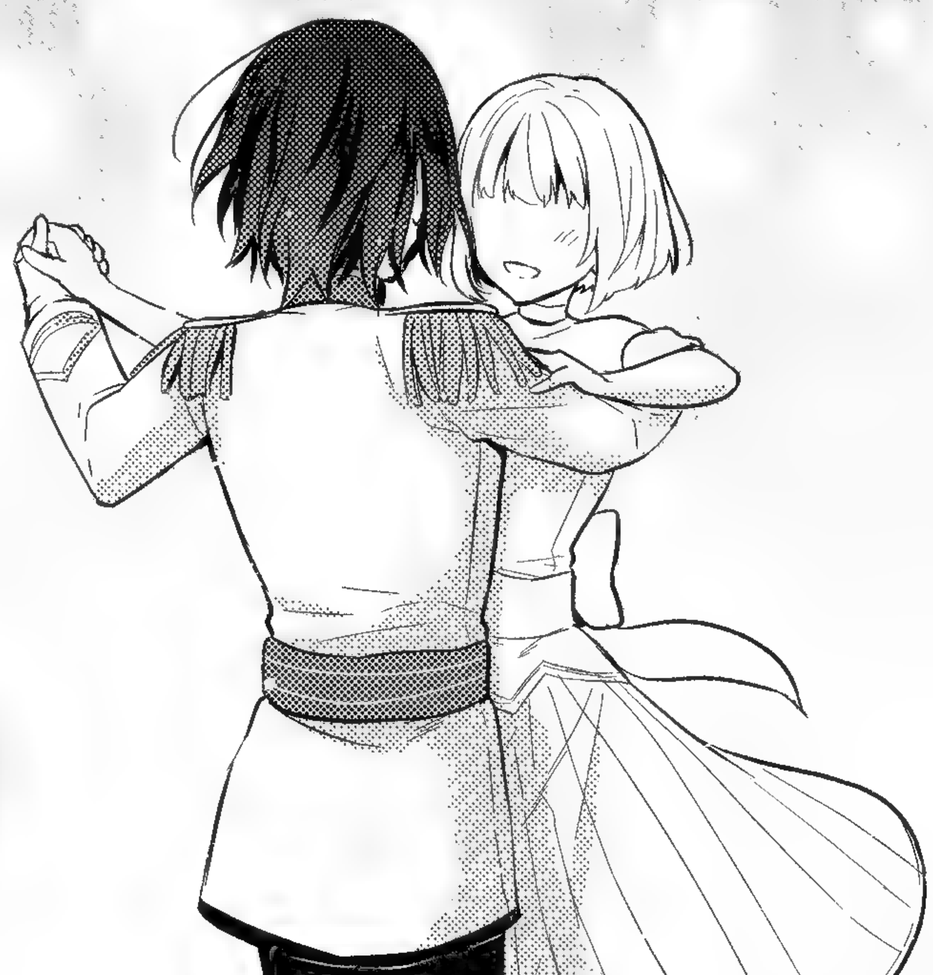
STILL, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, I'D RATHER NOT LOSE TO PRINCE SION ON THE DANCE FLOOR.

PREPARE YOURSELF, THOUGH. I DO NOT SPOIL MY STUDENTS!

...!

AND SO, ON THAT DAY...

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HER LIFE...



...MIA WAS ABLE TO DANCE TO HER HEART'S CONTENT.

Tearmoon Empire

Chapter 9

STEPPING BACK TO SHORTLY BEFORE THE PARTY BEGAN...

LET'S SEE...

THAT'S HIGH-QUALITY HORSE OIL FOR THE KITCHEN STAFF, TO SOOTHE THEIR PARCHED HANDS...

AND THE GARDEN WORKERS NEED STAMINA, SO MAYBE I SHOULD GET THEM SOME HEALTHY, ENERGY-BOOSTING FOODS?

AS FOR THE REST, I'M SURE I CAN GET EVERYTHING I NEED AT THE STORES I FOUND EARLIER...

HMPH

OKAY!

ALL RIGHT!

IT'S TIME TO DO SOME GOOD IN MILADY'S NAME!

ANNE?

ARE YOU SURE I SHOULD GO OUT THIS LIGHTLY DRESSED...?

IT'LL BE FINE, MILADY!

YOU LOOK WONDERFUL EVEN WITHOUT SOME FANCY DRESS ON!

PUSH

PUSH

GO ON, THEN! THE PARTY WILL BE STARTING ANY MINUTE NOW!

W-WELL, IF YOU SAY SO...

AH!

CLINK

?

THAT'S RIGHT. ANNE?

HOLD OUT YOUR HAND.

CONSIDER YOURSELF ON LEAVE WHILE I'M AT THE PARTY.

YOU CAN HEAD INTO TOWN OR STAY IN THE DORM. FEEL FREE TO DO WHATEVER YOU WISH.

HUH...!?

WHAT'S THIS FOR, MILADY?

IT'S FOR YOU TO USE HOWEVER YOU'D LIKE.

HEH...

NOT ONLY DO I OWE HER A DEBT FROM MY TIME IN PRISON, ANNE LEFT HER FAMILY BEHIND TO FOLLOW ME TO SCHOOL.

I HOPE THIS GIVES HER A CHANCE TO RELAX AND REFRESH HERSELF.

MILADY...

TO HOLD THE POSITION IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ALMOST ALL THE MAIDS WHO SERVE IN THE WHITEMOON PALACE.

THE PRINCESS'S MAID-IN-WAITING IS AN ILLUSTRIOUS ROLE.

FOR ONE THING, HER SALARY HAD ALMOST TRIPLED OVERNIGHT.

THAT PLUS THE FUNDS EARNED BY HER SISTER ELISE, WHO'D BEEN EMPLOYED AS MIA'S COURT ARTIST, MADE ANNE'S FAMILY RELATIVELY AFFLUENT.

SINCE RECEIVING THE JOB, ANNE'S LIFE HAD CHANGED DRAMATICALLY.

AND AS A RESULT...

YES, I UNDERSTAND.

CLENCH

I CAN'T USE THIS MONEY FOR JUST *ANYTHING*.

BAM

UNDER-STOOD, MILADY!

MILADY MIA IS TELLING ME TO USE IT TO **ACCOMPLISH** SOMETHING!

YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND! I'LL MAKE SURE IT GETS DONE!

...MIA'S MOST LOYAL RETAINER ENTIRELY MISUNDERSTOOD HER GESTURE.

What gets done...?

?

...

ALL RIGHT!

I THINK ALL MY ARRANGEMENTS ARE COMPLETE.

I'LL NEED TO MAKE AS MANY CONNECTIONS AS I CAN!

FOR THE SAKE OF MILADY'S LOVE **AND** SCHOOL LIFE!

IT TOOK A SMALL ARMY OF STAFF TO RUN THE CASTLE DAY-TO-DAY...

...AND THE SAME IS TRUE OF THIS SCHOOL!

HMM...?

OH, WOW!

HOW LOVELY!

IT IS LOVELY, YES...

...BUT I THINK IT'S A LITTLE TOO BIG FOR MILADY MIA.

AND IT COSTS EXACTLY AS MUCH MONEY AS I HAVE LEFT OVER...

HMM...

THERE'S STILL ABOUT TWO HOURS LEFT BEFORE THE PARTY ENDS...

MAYBE I'LL GO RELAX IN MY ROOM WHILE I WAIT?

GLANCE
キョろ

GLANCE
キョろ

...

I THINK SHE WAS WITH MISS TIONA.

OH, I KNOW THAT GIRL.

UMM...

IS SOMETHING WRONG?

...!

はAH

?!

PLEASE!

HELP!

SHE'S...

...UP THERE!

HELP HER...

...PLEASE!

MISS TIONA...

...IS LOCKED UP!

SHE'S *LOCKED UP?!* BUT WHERE...?

POINT

...BUT SHE DIDN'T.

I GOT AWAY...

BORN INTO THE LULU TRIBE, LIORA WAS RAISED IN A FORESTED REGION OF THE EMPIRE.

LIORA LULU

PLEASE BE CAREFUL, LIORA!

PLEASE DON'T...LEAN SO MUCH!

MISS TIONA...

IT'S...

...DAN-GEROUS!

BEING AS SHE HAD YET TO MASTER THE COMMON TONGUE, CONTINENTA, SHE WOULD NORMALLY HAVE NEVER BEEN IN THE RUNNING TO GO TO SAINT-NOEL.

KI

CK

THE RUDOLVONS LACKED THE FUNDS TO HIRE A VETERAN MAID TO ACCOMPANY THEIR DAUGHTER, THOUGH, AND ONE OTHER TRAIT OF LIORA'S SET HER APART...

BAM

...THAT BEING THE TRULY EXCEPTIONAL ATHLETICISM OF THE LULU PEOPLE.

THAT, ABOVE ALL ELSE, WAS WHY LIORA WAS CHOSEN AS TIONA'S ATTENDANT.

ANYONE...!

DASH

HELP!

THAT'S AWFUL...

BUT... PLEASE!

...PLEASE!

HELP... MISS TIONA!

SAVE HER...

WHO WOULD DO SUCH A THING?

I DON'T...

...KNOW.

ALL RIGHT. I'LL DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP.

LET'S GO! SHOW ME THE WAY!

...!

O-

OKAY!

TURN!!

OH, JEEZ... I AGREED WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT!

BUT THEN AGAIN...

MILADY MIA TRUSTED ME TO USE MY OWN JUDGMENT TONIGHT.

WHATEVER I DO, I HAVE TO UPHOLD HER GOOD NAME!

WHILE NOT PRECISELY WRONG, INTERNALLY, MIA'S THOUGHT PROCESS WOULD LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS.

How should we help her?

IF I IGNORE HER, I MIGHT BE PAVING MY OWN PATH TO THE GUILLOTINE! AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, ANNE'S GAZE IS BURNING MY CONSCIENCE!

TEARS OF BLOOD

TA-DAAAH

AND I KNOW FOR A FACT THAT SOMEONE AS KIND AND JUST AS MILADY WOULD JUMP STRAIGHT INTO ACTION, JUST LIKE I DID!

UNDERSTOOD! ALLOW ME TO HANDLE THIS!

HMM...?

THEY'RE...

...GUARDS.

BE...

...WARY!

WHAT ARE THOSE MEN UP TO...?

DIPLOMACY IS PROBABLY OFF THE TABLE, CONSIDERING THE CIRCUMSTANCES...

WHAT SHOULD WE DO...? THEY LOOK SO STRONG...

EEK!

JUMP

ANYTHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH, LADIES?

...PRINCE SION'S ATTENDANT?

YOUR NAME IS KEITHWOOD, RIGHT?

FWOOSH

YOU REMEMBERED! AN HONOR, TRULY...

...MISS ANNE, ATTENDANT TO PRINCESS MIA OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE.

TROUBLE, I PRESUME?

AH

YOU MUST BE, UMM...

PLEASE!

HELP...

...MISS TIONA!

LIORA LULU.

AH, YES! THIS IS THE MAID OF THE OUTLAND COUNT OF RUDOLVON'S DAUGHTER. HER NAME'S, UMM...

IS YOUR FRIEND HERE FROM THE EMPIRE AS WELL?

HOW MANY INSIDE?

TWO BY THE DOOR, HUH?

I THOUGHT I SMELLED SOMETHING FISHY, AND IT LOOKS LIKE MY NOSE WAS ON THE MARK...

WHICH MEANS THEY EITHER NOTICED YOUR ESCAPE AND PUT THE OTHER TWO ON WATCH INSIDE...

...OR THEY WENT ELSEWHERE, AND THOSE MEN WERE LEFT TO STAND GUARD.

I DON'T...

...KNOW.

BUT...

...WE WERE LOCKED IN BY...

...FOUR PEOPLE.

THERE WERE...

...MEN AND WOMEN.

IN ANY CASE, MILORD WOULD ROAST ME ALIVE IF HE FOUND OUT I LEFT YOU TO FEND FOR YOURSELVES.

COUNT ME IN, LADIES.

YOU'LL...

...REALLY HELP?

THANK YOU!

BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

DRAW THEM AWAY SO WE CAN SNEAK INSIDE?

OH, NO, NOTHING THAT COMPLICATED.

WHAM

GAH!

WHAT THE—

WHOOSH

CRASH

I'LL SAVE THE GOOD LADY FROM THE CLUTCHES OF EVIL.

THAT'S ALL.

...

SPEECHLESS

CLACK

ガチャ

UMM...

CAN ALL THE MALE ATTENDANTS DO, WELL... *THAT?*

!!!

HM? OH, NO...

LET'S JUST SAY I'M A SPECIAL CASE.

IT HELPS WHEN YOUR EMPLOYER IS A SENSE OF JUSTICE THAT GREW LEGS AND STARTED WALKING.

HERE'S THE KEY.

Found it on one of 'em.

TOSS

MISS TIONA!

ARE YOU...

...OKAY?!

...!

AH

HUG!!

LIORA!

ARE *YOU* OKAY?

IT'S GOOD TO SEE THAT YOU'RE SAFE, MISS RUDOLVON.

AREN'T YOU...

...PRINCESS MIA'S ATTENDANT?

WHEN I WENT BACK TO MY ROOM, MY DRESS WAS GONE.

THE ROOM HAD BEEN RANSACKED...

...AND WHOEVER IT WAS HAD LEFT A LETTER.

IF YOU WANT YOUR DRESS BACK, COME TO THE SCHOOL BUILDING'S NORTH TOWER.

HOW COME?

LOOK.

I FOUND THIS ON ONE OF THE GUARDS.

AN ACQUAINTANCE OF YOURS OR HER HIGHNESS'S, MOST LIKELY.

THAT'S TERRIBLE!

WHO WOULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

HUH?

STAND 9

THEY ARE, YES.

IS THAT...THE CREST OF THE TEARMOON EMPIRE?

THAT'S RIGHT.

I'D WAGER THEY'RE SERVANTS OF SOME IMPERIAL NOBLES.

THEY TOLD ME TO STAY AWAY FROM THE PARTY...

...BECAUSE I'D BE A DISGRACE TO THE EMPIRE'S REAL NOBILITY.

FWSH

GASP

HOW AWFUL...

MY FAMILY...

...DOESN'T HAVE THE MEANS TO FURNISH ME WITH MULTIPLE DRESSES.

YOU GIRLS TOOK ONE HELL OF A RISK COMING HERE ON YOUR OWN, YOU KNOW?

I KNOW THE DRESS IS IMPORTANT, BUT STILL— NOT SMART.

THERE WAS NO POINT GETTING OUT QUICKLY ANYMORE.

THAT'S WHY I SAID YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO TAKE SUCH A BIG RISK, LIORA.

MISS TIONA...

IF I WERE IN THE SAME POSITION...

IF I WERE LOCKED UP HERE WITH MILADY MIA...

CLENCH

PLEASE TAKE THIS AND USE IT TO BUY A DRESS!

RUSTLE

THERE'S ONE IN A STORE ON THE MAIN STREET THAT THIS SHOULD BE JUST ENOUGH FOR!

LIORA!

SHAH

SQUEEZE

I'D BE SO ANGUISHED, I COULDN'T BEAR IT.

IT'S MONEY. PRINCESS MIA ENTRUSTED ME WITH IT.

GO ON! HURRY!

CLINK

WHAT'S...

...THIS?

YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?

YOU'RE PRINCESS MIA'S MAID, RIGHT? SHOULD YOU REALLY BE HELPING?

...!

IN THE MEANTIME, MISS TIONA, I'LL REDO YOUR MAKEUP!

HAVE A SEAT!

HER HIGHNESS REIGNS OVER ALL THE EMPIRE'S NOBLES.

AND ASSUMING THE ONES WHO LOCKED LADY TIONA IN HERE REALLY ***WERE*** TEARMOON NOBILITY...

...?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT SEEMS POSSIBLE THEY DID SO UNDER PRINCESS MIA'S ORDERS, DON'T YOU THINK?

HUH...?

TIONA'S IMPRISONMENT OCCURRED IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE AS WELL.

AS SUCH, KEITHWOOD AND LIORA CARRIED OUT TIONA'S RESCUE ON THEIR OWN.

HOWEVER, MIA'S ATTENDANT WAS THE IRRESPONSIBLE THIRD DAUGHTER OF ONE OF THE CENTRAL NOBLE HOUSES—NOT ANNE.

I'm off to a tea party! Don't wait up!

...THAT BEING THE ACADEMY'S DE FACTO LEADER, RAFINA BELLUGA.

FACED WITH HER SHREDDED DRESS, THEY TURNED TO A HIGHER AUTHORITY FOR HELP...

...WHO SUBSEQUENTLY INVITED HER TO DANCE.

TIONA ACCEPTED, PERFORMED BRILLIANTLY, AND EARNED THE RESPECT AND ADMIRATION OF HER PEERS.

UNDER KEITHWOOD'S INSTRUCTIONS, SHE RELAYED THE DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT TO PRINCE SION...

TIONA MADE IT TO THE PARTY IN THE END, ALBEIT RATHER LATE.

PANT PANT

はぁ、

IT WAS ON THAT DAY THAT TIONA, TEARMOON'S FUTURE REVOLUTIONARY LEADER; PRINCE SION, HER COLLABORATOR...

...AND SAINT RAFINA, THEIR POWERFUL BACKER, FIRST MET AND FORMED THE BONDS THAT WOULD LEAD TO THEIR EVENTUAL COALITION.

...THE PRINCESS WHO STOOD AT THE TOP OF TEARMOON'S NOBLE HIERARCHY: MIA.

AS FOR THE INCIDENT'S RINGLEADER, THEIR SUSPICIONS QUICKLY FELL UPON THE MOST PROBABLE CULPRIT...

IN MIA'S MIND, SUCH TRIFLING MATTERS WERE UNWORTHY OF HER ATTENTION.

AN OUTLAND NOBLE'S DAUGHTER WAS MISTREATED? SUSPICIONS WERE BEING THROWN ABOUT WILDLY?

MIA NEVER ATTEMPTED TO CLEAR HER NAME.

AND SO THE TRIO'S WHOLEHEARTED CONTEMPT FOR MIA SOLIDIFIED, AND SHE TOOK HER FIRST DECISIVE STEP TOWARD THE GUILLOTINE.

AND NOW, THE TURBULENT TIDES OF TIME HAD BROUGHT HER BACK TO THAT MOMENT.

MIA STOOD AT RISK OF BEING SWEPT ALONG TOWARD THE SAME GRIM FATE SHE'D ONCE MET.

YOU THINK PRINCESS MIA...

...IS THE CULPRIT?

OR SHE WOULD HAVE...

PFF

WHY, THAT'S THE MOST RIDICULOUS THING I'VE EVER HEARD!

...HAD ANNE NOT STOOD BOLDLY BEFORE HER AND DIVERTED ITS CURRENT!

I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT PROVOKE HER INTO SPILLING THE BEANS...

...BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THERE WASN'T A SHRED OF DOUBT THERE TO BEGIN WITH.

I SEE THE PRINCESS HAS A FIRM GRIP ON HER ATTENDANTS' HEARTS.

HEE HEE HEE!

PLEASE, KEITHWOOD, YOU HAVE TO BE PULLING MY LEG!

IT'S JUST SO ABSURD, I CAN'T HELP BUT LAUGH!

HER TOO? NOW THAT'S SOMETHING.

ふぅ SIGH

DULY NOTED. IF THE VICTIM HERSELF BELIEVES AS MUCH, THEN LET IT BE SO.

おずおず HESITANT

U-UMM...

I DON'T THINK HER HIGHNESS WOULD DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT EITHER.

...

IF SO, THEN IN A SENSE, PRINCESS MIA *IS* RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT THOSE TEARMOON NOBLES DID.

UMM, KEITHWOOD? I WAS THINKING...

COULD IT BE THAT IN YOUR KINGDOM, THOSE WHO RULE ARE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTIONS OF THOSE BENEATH THEM?

AND THAT'S WHY, AT THE RISK OF OVERSTEPPING...

I PROMISE TO DELIVER MISS TIONA TO THE BALLROOM IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO!

AS PRINCESS MIA'S RIGHT HAND, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS INCIDENT ON HER BEHALF!

FWSHSHSHSHSHSH

WOW, SHE'S FAST...

RUMMAGE

SO PLEASE, TAKE A SEAT, MISS TIONA!

I'LL REDO YOUR MAKEUP!

THUS, MIA'S RIGHT HAND TOOK FATE BY THE HORNS...

DID MILADY SEE THIS COMING? IS THAT WHY SHE HAD ME DO HER MAKEUP? AS PRACTICE?

NO WAY, RIGHT?

...AND CHANGED THE FLOW OF HISTORY FOREVER.

!

...WRESTLED IT ONTO A DIFFERENT PATH...

PANT はぁ

I MADE IT!

?

WHAT A CROWD...

パチ CLAP

パチ CLAP

パチ CLAP

THERE!

パチ CLAP

パチ CLAP

CHEER チア

JUMP

!

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, BUT I MUST DECLINE.

DON'T YOU THINK THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE WHO'D BE A MORE SUITABLE PARTNER FOR YOU, PRINCE SION?

GRACEFUL

SO, PRINCESS MIA.

CARE TO JOIN ME FOR ANOTHER NUMBER? A QUIETER ONE, THIS TIME...?

BEFUDDLED

...HUH?

HESITANT

AH...

I WAS UTTERLY CAPTIVATED!

SQUEAL

YOU WERE INCREDIBLE, PRINCE SION!

I HAVE TO GIVE THIS TO HIM.

SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU, MISS RUDOLVON...

...BUT WOULD YOU MIND GIVING THIS TO PRINCE SION?

RESOLVED

YES... I HAVE TO.

EVERYONE DID THEIR BEST TO GET ME HERE, AND I MUST DO MY PART AS WELL!

MY NAME IS TIONA RUDOLVON.

HM? I DO BELIEVE WE'VE MET. AREN'T YOU...

PUSH

EXCUSE ME!

PUSH

PRINCE SION!

EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT.

UMM, KEITHWOOD TOLD ME TO GIVE YOU THIS...

...?

WHAT...?

EARLIER TONIGHT, MISS RUDOLVON AND HER MAID WERE LOCKED UP IN A TOWER.

FOUR CULPRITS, MEN AND WOMEN, ASSOCIATED WITH TEARMOON NOBILITY.

TWO WERE APPREHENDED AT THE SCENE.

IT'S POSSIBLE THAT PRINCESS MIA WAS INVOLVED IN THE INCIDENT.

FOR CAUTION'S SAKE, PLEASE CONSIDER:

?

HEH

FOR CAUTION'S SAKE, INDEED.

...

I DOUBT KEITHWOOD HIMSELF TRULY SUSPECTS THE PRINCESS WAS INVOLVED AT ALL.

IN FACT, I'M PRETTY SURE HE'S FOND OF PEOPLE LIKE HER.

DON'T YOU THINK THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE WHO'D BE A MORE SUITABLE PARTNER FOR YOU, PRINCE SION?

BUT WITH THAT SAID...

CONSIDERING PRINCESS MIA'S ATTITUDE A MOMENT AGO...

AND SO SHE ENTRUSTED MISS RUDOLVON TO ME, IN THE HOPES THAT THE POOR GIRL COULD AT LEAST ENJOY THE PARTY.

SHE PROBABLY FIGURED OUT WHAT HAPPENED WITH A SINGLE GLANCE.

I'M ALL BUT CERTAIN SHE SPOTTED MISS RUDOLVON FROM THE DANCE FLOOR.

"A MORE SUITABLE PARTNER." IN OTHER WORDS...

...SHE WAS SAYING THAT THIS GIRL NEEDS MY HELP!

SHE MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT.

UMM... PRINCE SION?

HEH HEH

STILL, MY DEAR PRINCESS, NEXT TIME YOU MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER THE NUANCES OF THE WORD "SUITABLE."

MISS RUDOLVON.

AH, MY APOLOGIES.

!

WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN ME FOR THE NEXT NUMBER?

...CERTAINLY.

WOW!

HOW BEAUTIFUL...

I HOPE THE PARTY'S GOING WELL.

AND I HOPE MILADY AND MISS TIONA ARE ENJOYING THEMSELVES!

THE PARTY WOULD LAST WELL INTO THE MOONLIT NIGHT...

...RESOLVING ITSELF IN A MANNER ALTOGETHER UNLIKE THAT OF THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE.

Tearmoon Empire

Side Story

DAH-DAN!!

BEHIND THE SCENES OF OPERATION HANDKERCHIEF DROP, SHORTLY AFTER THE PLAN WAS SETTLED UPON...

LET'S MAKE OUR MOVE AT ONCE!

YOU CAN DO IT, MILADY!

OH!

RIGHT, OF COURSE...

I'LL HAVE TO FIND A ROUTE FOR US TO RUN INTO HIM BEFORE WE CAN PUT THE PLAN INTO MOTION!

FIRST, THOUGH, WHO DO YOU HAVE YOUR EYE ON?

AH!

SKCH SKCH SKCH SKCH

HIS HAIR WAS LIKE THIS, I BELIEVE...

HAZY

THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM WAS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION! HMM...

UMM... HE'S A BOY OF MY AGE NAMED PRINCE ABEL...

UTTERLY APPALLING

HE LOOKS LIKE THIS!

UNDER-STOOD!

ARE YOU SURE?

CLENCH

EXCUSE ME!

I'M LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY NAMED ABEL...

ABEL?

YES, I KNOW HIM.

YOU DO?!

HE'S RIGHT OVER THERE.

THAT... DOESN'T SEEM QUITE RIGHT.

THE MAN MILADY DREW LOOKS A LITTLE SLIMMER...

PUDGY

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP, THOUGH!

NO, UMM... I'M SORRY, BUT I BELIEVE I'M LOOKING FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

NOT HIM, HUH?

MEOOOW

THAT'S ABEL, UP THERE!

NOT THE RIGHT **SPECIES**, EVEN!

ELDERLY

OH, ABEL'S RIGHT THERE.

NOT THE RIGHT AGE...

ABEL? THAT'S HIM.

NOT THE RIGHT HAIRSTYLE...

UGH...

SIGH

AND I CAN'T AFFORD TO KEEP MILADY WAITING MUCH LONGER...

I NEVER KNEW THERE WERE SO MANY ABELS OUT THERE.

INSPECT

PARDON ME!

YOU THERE, MY DEAR LADY!

...AND HE HAS A WONDERFUL SMILE...

HIS HAIR IS DARK, HIS EYES ARE SHARP...

HA HA, I'M NO ONE IMPORTANT, REALLY.

OH, BUT I SIMPLY MUST KNOW! PLEASE!

OH MY, THANK YOU SO MUCH!

WILL YOU TELL ME YOUR NAME, GOOD SIR?

WELL, IF YOU *INSIST*...

HERE.

YOU DROPPED YOUR HANDKER-CHIEF.

IT LOOKS JUST LIKE HIM!

FEEL FREE TO TAKE OFFENSE, PRINCE ABEL.

AMAZED

IT'S ABEL.

ABEL REMNO, AT YOUR SERVICE.

?

STARE...

REACH

U-UMM...

STAY STILL FOR A MOMENT.

HUH?

WHAM

IT'S JUST LIKE IN ELISE'S STORIES!

HE PUSHED HER UP AGAINST THE WALL!

EEEK!!!

SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ
SPARKLE キラ

PARDON ME.

IT SEEMS EVEN THE TREES HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES DRAWN TO YOUR LOVELY LOCKS, MY DEAR.

SNAG

THERE WE ARE! A LEAF WAS IN YOUR HAIR.

EEEEEK!

はわわわわわ FLUSTER

TH—

THANK YOU VERY MUCH...

THIS PART WAS IN ELISE'S STORIES TOO!

THE DORMS!

I HAVE TO TELL MILADY RIGHT AWAY!

AH

NOW THEN, I SHOULD BE OFF.

I'M AFRAID I HAVE BUSINESS AT THE DORMS.

IF HE'S HEADING FOR THE BOYS' DORMS, I CAN LIE IN WAIT BY THE GARDEN OF WATER!

YOU CAN DO IT, MILADY!

I'm off!

よっBEAMよよ

SPLENDID JOB, ANNE!

I CAN SEE WHY MILADY FELL FOR HIM!

HE REALLY WAS EVERYTHING A GIRL WOULD WANT IN A PRINCE, THOUGH!

OHO HO HO! I SIMPLY MUST ENGINEER A RELATIONSHIP WITH PRINCE ABEL, NO MATTER WHAT!

MY PRECIOUS REINFORCEMENTS ARE RIDING ON IT!

SMIRK

IN TRUTH, OF COURSE, MIA WANTED TO MAKE CONTACT WITH ABEL TO FURTHER HER OWN SELF-PRESERVATION PLOT.

...HER FEELINGS FOR ABEL WOULD GROW FAR BEYOND MERE CALCULATED SELF-INTEREST.

AT THE TIME, SHE HAD YET TO REALIZE THAT LITTLE BY LITTLE...

Short Story

Mia and the Moonlight Dress

Mia and the Moonlight Dress

Empress Consort Adelaide, the mother of Mia Luna Tearmoon, was an individual characterized by an overall lack of characteristic features. She was frail and sickly, and she hardly ever showed her face at high-society gatherings. Her tragic passing took place immediately after Mia's birth.

Adelaide was passably attractive—perhaps ever so slightly above average—and could just barely have been described as pretty, if one were feeling charitable. She was, at least in some senses of the word, as ordinary a woman as you could ever find. However, she had one singular talent that set her apart from her peers: Adelaide was a skilled seamstress.

She was, after all, born in Cotillard, a region known for its thriving textile trade. It was a longstanding tradition in the area for mothers to personally sew their daughters' most formal set of clothing. In spite of the fact that it was hardly a suitable pastime for a woman of Adelaide's standing, she had always enjoyed sewing as well. To be fair, she had to borrow the talents of dedicated craftsmen on occasion when her own skills didn't suffice, but on the whole, her ability was nothing to sneeze at.

One day, as Adelaide sat before a bolt of cloth, arms folded and deep in thought, her husband, Emperor Matthias Luna Tearmoon, approached her. "Are you doing all right, Adelaide?" he asked, his brow furrowed with concern.

"My," Adelaide replied with a grin, "I assure you, my work is going perfectly well! I don't make a habit of wasting fabric for a laugh."

Matthias shook his head with an exasperated smile. "That's not what I meant, actually..."

"I'm well aware, my dearest." Adelaide's grin took on a gentle, loving tinge as she stroked her belly. It bulged noticeably, a sign of the new life growing within. "I'll see to it that our child is born, no matter what it costs," she added as her expression pivoted once more to a portrait of resolve.

No matter what it costs—in other words, even if it cost her life. Matthias was well aware of the implication hidden behind her words, and opened his mouth to refute them...but found himself speechless.

How could I even think to say such a thing? Matthias reprimanded himself. As the emperor of Tearmoon, he bore the solemn duty to produce a successor, one way or another. Even should his beloved spouse's life be put at risk, he couldn't allow his resolve to waver. Doubly so given that his Adela herself had made her determination to see it through abundantly clear.

Matthias let out a short, quiet sigh, then found his composure and spoke up once more. "I'm as amazed as ever by the deftness of your hands," he said. "What are you making today?"

"A dress for our child. Of course, I haven't the skill to make the sort of dress a princess would wear to a formal occasion. I'm afraid its design will be far too simple," Adelaide confessed with a frown. "But nevertheless, I wanted to make *something* for her."

"Yes, well," Matthias began, then hesitated awkwardly. "Of course, you *do* realize we can't guarantee the child will be a girl?"

By all rights it was a perfectly reasonable objection, but Adelaide shook her head. "No, I'm quite certain. She *will* be a girl. I just know," she replied, without so much as a hint of doubt.

"You *know*? But, how?" Matthias asked, cocking his head in confusion.

"Oho ho ho," chortled Adelaide. "Call it a mother's instinct!"

She smiled the knowing grin of a prophet—a smile that made you believe she really did know it all. Matthias had always had a weakness for that smile of hers. It made him want to accept anything and everything she told him without the slightest protest. All he could do was chuckle at his own inability to oppose her.

"Well, if you say so," said Matthias. "Yes, I'm certain you're correct. And I'm certain our daughter will love the dress you make for her."

"I can only hope so," sighed Adelaide. "Oh, but I don't know what her measurements will be, of course! You'll have to call in a craftsman to adjust it to fit her when the time comes."

Matthias blinked. "But...why not just do it yourself?"

"Hee hee! Yes, of course. I certainly hope I'll be able to," Adelaide replied with a kind, gentle smile. Matthias would never forget that smile, warm and bright as a ray of sunshine, for as long as he lived.

And so time marched on...

"The time has finally come. Mia's finally old enough to ship off to Saint-Noel," muttered Matthias, gazing longingly at his daughter's luggage. He couldn't stop a sigh from slipping past his lips. "Would that Adela were here to see her off..."

Matthias held a piece of clothing: the dress that Adelaide had left behind for Mia. It was by no means a poorly made garment, as

best as he could tell. Anyone would surely be shocked to learn that it was the work of an emperor's wife rather than a seamstress by trade.

Regrettably, though, any dress was forever at the mercy of fashion, and per modern trends, the one Adelaide had made was just a little too simple to be considered in vogue. One could hardly have expected more from her work, to be fair. Amateurs, after all, do have their limits.

"Mia is such a kind child," Matthias said to himself. "If she knew her mother made this dress for her, she might force herself to flout fashion and wear it anyway."

In the worst case, his daughter might wind up making a laughingstock of herself. He could hardly bear the thought...but at the same time, he simply couldn't bring himself to bury the dress deep in a closet, never to be seen again. Thus, Matthias chose to surreptitiously stow it away in Mia's luggage, sending the dress her mother had made to school along with her. Though not before commissioning a tailor to adjust it to fit her perfectly, of course! His Imperial Majesty was as good as his word!

"Perhaps a time will come when she has the chance to wear it," mused Matthias. "No harm wearing something less than perfectly fashionable to a less than formal occasion, after all."

And so the dress accompanied Mia to school, with Mia herself none the wiser.

Some time later at Saint-Noel Academy, Mia's personal maid-in-waiting was busy at work unpacking the princess's belongings. The maid in question was the third daughter of one of the empire's central noble families, and as such was relatively high on the social status spectrum. It was that elevated status, plus no small amount of flattery directed toward Mia herself, that had won her the vaunted

position of the princess's maid-in-waiting, and her accomplishment had her in the highest of spirits.

"So *this* is Saint-Noel! Hee hee hee—if I play my cards right, I might even make the close acquaintance of a dashing prince! Oh, just think of the possibilities!" she muttered to herself, humming happily as she sorted through the luggage that had been sent from the empire. The sheer quantity of elegant, luxurious dresses that the princess had been sent was enough to leave her spellbound. "These truly are outfits fit for royalty! Incredible, every one of them!"

She laid each dress out on the bed, one by one, giving an appreciative nod as she inspected each garment. "Oh, what a lovely design! Whatever did they use to dye it such a vibrant shade of blue? And oh, *my*, this one has *gemstones* worked into its embroidery! And every one of them is beautiful in its own right! Oh...*this* is an incredible piece as well! How wonderful it would be to wear a dress like this!"

The maid held each dress up to her body, acting almost as if she was sorting through her own personal wardrobe. Classes were in session, and she was taking full advantage of Mia's absence to have the run of their shared room.

"Now *this* is truly something special! I wonder if Princess Mia would be kind enough to give it to me? Oh, but I suppose it's probably a little small..."

Truly, she was having the time of her life...until, suddenly, she came to a stop.

"Oh...? What is *this*?" she asked, furrowing her brow as she pulled a new dress out from Mia's luggage.

It was clear at a glance that the garment had been crafted with the utmost of care. The stitching of the seams was flawless, and while

simple in design, what embroidery there was had been sewn with painstaking attention to detail. But, all that being said...

"Hmm—what a tacky design. Who would humiliate themselves by wearing a dress like *this* in this day and age? Certainly not *me*! Why, I can only imagine how furious Princess Mia would be if I were to slip up and suggest that she wear it..." The maid put on a truly disagreeable scowl. "And I *certainly* couldn't bear it if she went and decided to give *this* horrid thing to me! I'd *never* live it down if I was coerced into wearing the likes of it! I'll have to shove it *far* in the back, where she'll never find it!"

And so the maid crumpled up the dress and sealed it away deep inside Mia's luggage. There it would remain until Mia returned to the Imperial Capital, whereupon it was stashed in the back of the princess's dressing room, never to be worn by anyone, much less Mia herself. As a matter of fact, she never even laid eyes upon it so much as once. Finally, in the end, it was burned to ashes at the hands of the revolutionary army.

But in another timeline, it would meet an altogether different fate...

It was the day of the entrance commemoration party, and Anne was flailing about in a blind panic.

"What should I do?! Which should I choose?! There must be *something* simple enough to put on that Milady will still make it to the party in time!"

Who could have possibly foreseen this turn of events? Not Anne, that's for sure, nor was she at all prepared to cope with them!

She had dressed Mia *flawlessly* for the dance party. Anne had never been especially handy as far as that sort of thing went,

but she'd scheduled plenty of time for the task and had made thorough preparations. As a result, Mia had looked absolutely stunning in her party dress.

The dress itself was truly glamorous and perfectly in line with the latest trends, of course, but what really elevated the ensemble was the care and attention with which each and every little piece had been arranged upon her. The end result had been an outfit truly befitting an imperial princess. And yet...

"A horse sneezed on her? A *horse*?!" The situation was so absurd, Anne didn't know whether to laugh or cry. One way or another, though, she would have to choose a new dress—and fast. "But how could I? That dress was far and away the one that suited Milady the best..."

The emperor had sent an incredible number of dresses to the Academy for his daughter. Anne and Mia had spent quite some time discussing their options, and had finally settled upon one dress as the clear winner. As a result, no matter *what* dress Anne chose, it would never feel like anything more than a poor substitute.

"And there's just no *time*," Anne wailed. The timeline she was working with, in fact, ruled out even the dresses that would have otherwise qualified as an unsatisfactory plan B. Her list of options was excruciatingly small, and it was growing smaller by the second.

Nevertheless, Anne persevered! The look on Mia's face when she told her to "pick any old dress" had simply been too tragic for Anne to allow it to stand!

"I'll do *something* about this! I have to, for Milady's sake!"

And so, as her maid's spirit burned brighter and fiercer than ever before, Anne's gaze fell upon one dress that stood out from the rest.

"What's *this*...?" she wondered to herself. It was a well-made white dress, exceedingly simple in its design. So simple, in fact, that it was surely unsuitable for a party...and yet Anne couldn't tear her eyes away from it. It was only when she took it in hand that she realized. "This fabric—it's *incredibly* high quality..."

The cloth was silky smooth and astonishingly pleasant to the touch. On a second glance, Anne also noticed that it had a slight shimmering quality.

"It's beautiful..." Anne whispered. "Could this be moonsilk...?"

Among all the textiles that circulated within the Tearmoon Empire, moonsilk was considered to be one of the very finest. Anne had never even seen the material before she became Mia's maid-in-waiting, but between the way it flowed through her fingers like running water and the brilliant, faintly glimmering luster of its thread, so very reminiscent of moonlight, there could be no mistaking it.

Moreover, the longer she looked at the dress, the more Anne came to realize that it had been stitched with an astonishing attention to detail, and sized to fit Mia to a T on top of it. Simple though its design was, it had an understated elegance that gave it a surprising degree of appeal. It was a splendid piece of work all around.

Anne thought back on the dresses she'd looked at previously. In retrospect, she'd picked out her top options based upon the beauty of the dresses themselves. While this dress lacked their eye-catching appeal, it felt like it was designed instead to draw out the beauty of the wearer herself. But not just any wearer...

"How strange... It's almost unbelievable how well it seems this dress would suit Milady Mia!" Anne said to herself. Indeed, it almost felt like the dress was *begging* for the princess to wear it. "Yes... It would be next to impossible to put Milady in a formal dress with the

time we have left, so choosing a simpler, understated design seems like a good choice. And if that's the direction I'm going in..."

Suggesting a plain, informal dress was a remarkably daring move on Anne's part. She knew that Mia had a certain natural beauty to her, and she was aware that Mia had splendid, supple skin that would make her the envy of any onlooker. In Anne's mind, Mia would look best in simple makeup and a dress that didn't distract from her own features.

What Anne did *not* know, however, was whether or not those opinions flew in the face of common sense as courtly customs dictated it. Anne was, after all, a commoner by birth. She didn't have the faintest clue about what hoity-toity nobles believed went without saying when it came to clothing.

And so Anne hesitated, stuck in an impossible internal conflict between her desire to do something for Mia and her desire to *not* inadvertently humiliate her. In the end, though...as strange as it was...she couldn't shake the feeling that somehow, if she had Mia wear *that* dress, everything would turn out just fine. It almost felt like the dress had the power to protect her beloved princess. Like it was giving her the gentle push on the back she needed to take that last, fateful step forward.

"That's right... Now that I think about it, Milady's father is the one who sent this dress to her. That settles it—I just *know* it will protect her!"

And so Anne, her maid's spirit blazing with passion once more, took up the dress and sped off to help Mia change into it. Happily enough, she got the job done without any major mishaps and immediately realized that her intuition had been right on the mark.

"Anne...? Do you really think I should go to the party so lightly dressed...?" asked Mia, anxiety written all over her face.

"It'll be all right, Milady!" Anne declared with absolute confidence. "You don't need some fabulously glamorous dress to look stunning!" *And if you're wearing* that *dress, I just know everything will turn out okay,* she added internally.

In the end, the night of the entrance commemoration party would become one of Mia's most treasured of happy memories. And not just the party itself—the dress she wore that night became a precious memento of the experience. It would be a long, long time, however, before Mia learned that the very same dress was the handiwork of her late mother...but that is a story for another day.

Tearmoon Empire

♦ Afterword ♦

Congratulations on the publication of the manga's second volume!

This is the author of the original novels, Nozomu Mochitsuki.

This volume features what has to be one of the most dazzling and dreamy events in Mia's lifetime, if not *the* most: the dance party! I was really looking forward to seeing it in manga form...but when I finally did, I found myself dazzled by Mia herself instead!

What a blunder! (lol)

Thank you for drawing Mia's incredible skills on the dance floor so well, Ms. Morino! Your art this volume was just the best!

And finally, thank you to all the readers who've decided to give this manga a try. I hope you've enjoyed watching Mia dance her heart out!

Nozomu Mochitsuki

It's the second volume! Thank you very much for sticking with the series so far.

Compared to the original novels, this manga adaptation is still in its opening act, but there've already been so many scenes that are just overflowing with charm, I keep finding myself so excited to keep drawing I can barely restrain myself! I hope that both those following the manga alongside the novels and those who are reading the manga exclusively will continue to sit back and enjoy the journey along with me.

Oh, and while I'm at it, congratulations on *Tearmoon Empire's* theatrical adaptation! I'm sure this story will make for a wonderful play, and I hope everyone will show up to support it. I'm certainly excited!

That's all for now!
I hope I'll see you again in volume 3!

Morino

TEARMOON EMPIRE (MANGA) VOLUME 2
by Nozomu Mochitsuki (story) and Mizu Morino (artwork)
Original character designs by Gilse

Translated by Tristan K. Hill
Edited by Samantha J. Moore
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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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